

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Salton Sea Authority [Authority] has been tasked to conduct an opportunities assessment of recreation and local economic opportunities that could be implemented as part of an ecosystem restoration program at the Salton Sea. This assessment will focus on recreation and local economic opportunities associated with alternatives that will be considered in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report [PEIR] for ecosystem restoration that is currently under preparation by the California Department of Water Resources [DWR]. Three factors have consistently been identified as the critical for future economic development:

- Improvement of water quality, including control and reduction of salinity;
- Stabilization of the water surface elevation; and
- Reduction of odors.

These factors have been assumed to be part of any restoration program for the Salton Sea. Numerous recreational facilities and opportunities for recreation and economic development currently exist around the Sea. The Authority was tasked to develop a prioritized list of specific recreational activities, user areas, facilities, services, and other amenities, consistent with the ecosystem management focus of the program, that address protection and possible enhancement of recreation values surrounding the Salton Sea.

In February 2004, the Authority appointed an Outdoor Recreation Advisory Task Force [ORATF] to evaluate the recreational potential of a restored Salton Sea and present recommendations to the Salton Sea Authority Board. A Recreation Opportunities Survey was developed and distributed to ORATF members, mailing lists of stakeholders through the Authority and the DWR, and to the general public. Two public meetings were held on Thursday, April 28, 2005, to solicit comments from the general public and stakeholders on the Recreation Opportunities Survey. The results of the feedback received determined the overall list of recreation activities and facilities considered. Based upon the survey responses, an analysis of each activity was conducted to establish key issues and to evaluate strategies for implementation.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the survey is to formally develop recommendations regarding recreation opportunities associated with an ecosystem restoration program. The survey asked respondents to identify and prioritize recreation activities that they recommended to be implemented or expanded at the Salton Sea, the types of facilities that would be required to support those activities, and the general area of the Salton Sea where these opportunities could be implemented. Nine (9) recreation areas were identified: boating; camping; fishing; off-highway vehicle [OHV]; resort; trail-related; wildlife-related; water contact; and other. Including sub-activities, the survey resulted in a list of 20 activities to be evaluated. The activities evaluated in the survey are listed below:

- Boating: Kayaking
- Boating: Power/Sailboating
- Camping: Guest Rentals
- Camping: RV
- Camping: Tent

- Fishing: Freshwater
- Fishing: Marine
- Off-Highway Vehicle [OHV] Use
- Resort: Gaming
- Resort: Golf
- Trail-Related: Hiking
- Trail-Related: Biking
- Trail-Related: Horseback Riding
- Wildlife-Related: Bird watching/Photography
- Wildlife-Related: Hunting
- Water Contact: Personal Watercraft [PWC] Use
- Water Contact: Swimming/Sunbathing
- Other: General Photography
- Other: Skydiving

SURVEY RESULTS

Potential recreation activities are presented below in the order of “priority” as a result of combining the results of the recreation survey by both the ORATF and stakeholder feedback.

1. Bird watching/Photography
2. Power boating/Sailboating
3. Photography-general
4. Hiking
5. Camping - Tents
6. Freshwater Fishery
7. Kayaking
8. Marine Fishery
9. Biking
10. Camping - RVs
11. Swimming/Sunbathing
12. Camping – Guest Rentals
13. Horseback Riding
14. Windsurfing
15. PWC
16. Hunting
17. Resort - Golf
18. Resort - Gaming
19. Skydiving
20. OHV Use

The surveys further divided the Sea into four areas to evaluate facility locations: North [Zone 1]; East [Zone 2]; South [Zone 3]; and West [Zone 4]. Summary of survey results identified the zone(s) preferred for facility location. A summary table of prioritized activities, existing/proposed average annual capacity, and implementation costs is available in Table ES-1.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Salton Sea generates tourist-based income and employment for the surrounding communities. It also represents an essential infrastructure for the local economy by serving as a repository for stormwater and agricultural runoff from the Imperial and Coachella valleys. The

Sea also provides a number of other functions that influence the local economies, including providing subsistence fishing for local Native Americans and serving as an aesthetic asset to the region.

The project and related actions may affect social and economic conditions of areas near the Sea. These areas may be classified into: 1) the local area with the most direct economic effects from restoring the Sea, and 2) the regional area that has an economic relationship with the Sea. For purposes of this analysis, the first is considered to be contained within an approximate ten (10) mile radius of the shore also encompassing the communities of Mecca, Calipatria, Niland, and Salton City.

The proposed project assumes restoration of the entire Sea. Under this program the Sea could be maintained at or slightly below its current size and elevation. It is estimated that the total construction costs could range from approximately \$300 million to \$1.0 billion over five years. Due to time lags in data collection and processing, most data series are for 2003 which is the most recent year available. While there has been a recent spark of economic revitalization in the area, current conditions are expected to be similar in scale and magnitude because no major events have occurred in the area to date to substantially affect economic trends.

The construction and operation of the restored and revitalized Sea are likely to result in positive economic effects on communities immediately adjacent to the shoreline of the Sea as well as Imperial and Riverside Counties. Assuming an investment ranging from approximately \$300 million to \$1.0 billion over five years to restore the Sea, positive economic effects could include increased spending for wages of workers from the local area, increased profits to local material suppliers and service providers as well as increases in short- and long-term job creation.

It is estimated that, restoration of the Sea could result in incremental property taxes to support restoration with a net present value amount of approximately \$626 million. It is envisioned that Salton Sea restoration could stimulate the development of new residential housing units within proximity of the Sea. For the purposes of this analysis, given the available land base, it was estimated that about 80,000 units to be constructed over a period of 30- to 40-years upon completion of the restoration project, primarily in three regions along the northern and western shore of the Salton Sea.

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Table ES-1. Summary of Evaluation of Recreation Opportunities for Salton Sea.

Ranking	Activity	Zone(s) (* denotes preferred zone)	Facilities		Annual Capacity		Implementation Cost (not including cost of land acquisition)
			Existing	Reasonable Capacity	Existing	Projected	
2	Boating: Power Boating, Sailboating, Houseboating	East [Zone 2]	8 existing ramps/marinas	12 new ramps/marinas	Power/Sail launches: 200,000 Houseboat Rentals: 0	Power/Sail launches: 2.4 – 60 million Houseboat rentals: 144	Basic boat launch with small piers/floating docks \$100,000 to \$0.5M; major marina facilities >\$10M
7	Kayaking	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	8 existing launch areas	19 new beach launch/minor docks	Unregulated use	100,000	Basic kayak launch with small piers <\$100,000
12	Camping- Guest Rentals	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	Multiple Cabins	Multiple Cabins	Unknown	Unknown	Cabin development : \$100,000 to >\$10M
10	Camping- RV	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	13 existing	Up to 20 new facilities	3,000 to 4,000	22,800	Facility development: <\$1,000 to \$1M
5	Camping- Tent	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	13 existing	Potential for expansion of a few existing facilities; Up to 10 new facilities	2,000	3,000	Facility development: <\$1,000 to \$0.5M
6	Freshwater Fishing	North [Zone 1]; East [Zone 2]	No designated facilities	Up to 5 new facilities	Limited by available habitat	Dependent on demand- Limited by available habitat	Fully developed launch facilities: \$500,000 to \$1M; shoreline access <\$100,000
8	Marine Fishing	North [1], East [Zone 2], and West [Zone 4]	No designated facilities	Up to 10 new facilities	60,000 anglers	120,000 – 180,000 anglers per year	Fully developed launch facilities : \$500,000 to \$1M; shoreline access <\$100,000
20	Off-Highway Vehicle	All Zones	No designated facilities	8 new	Very Small	Dependent on demand	Minimal facilities and services <\$100,000
18	Resort/Gaming	North [Zone 1] and West [Zone 4]	None	12 restored/new	Very small	1.2 million	Cost range likely from \$1M to >\$10 M
17	Resort/Golf	West [Zone 4]*	None	60 – 300 new	N/A	3.6 – 18 million	Cost range likely from \$1M to >\$10 M
Biking: 9 Hiking: 4 Horseback Riding: 13	Trail Related - Hiking, Biking, Horseback Riding	Biking: North [Zone 1]; East [Zone 2], South [Zone 3] Hiking: North [Zone 1]; East [Zone 2], South [Zone 3] Horseback Riding: East [Zone 2]	No designated facilities	Biking: 96 new Hiking: 96 new Horseback: 96 new	Biking: N/A Hiking: N/A Horseback Riding: N/A	Biking: 400,000 users Hiking: 400,000 users Horseback: 400,000 users	Basic trail facilities and supporting infrastructure : <\$100,000 up to \$0.5M; More elaborate systems: up to \$1M
1	Wildlife Related-, Bird watching/Photography	North [Zone 1]; East [Zone 2], South [Zone 3]	No designated facilities	8 new	6,000	60,000 – 120,000	Basic facilities: <\$100,000; More complex structures range from \$100,000 to \$0.5M
16	Wildlife Related- Hunting	South [Zone 3]	No designated facilities	4 restored/new	10,000 use days	12,000 use days	Basic facilities: <\$100,000; more complex structures: \$100,000 to \$0.5M
15	Water Contact Activities- Personal Watercraft	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	8 existing ramps/marinas restored	8 existing ramps/marinas restored; 12 new ramps/marinas	100,000 launches	1.5 – 2.5 million launches	Basic boat launch with small piers: \$100,000 to \$0.5M; major marina facilities >\$10M
11	Water Contact- Swimming/Sunbathing	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	6 existing beaches	14 new beaches	Unknown	50,000	Basic beach facility with small piers and boom: \$100,000 to \$0.5M
14	Water Contact- Windsurfing	East [Zone 2] and West [Zone 4]	6 existing beaches	4 new beaches or hand-launch areas	100,000 launches	1.5 – 2.5 launches	Basic beach facilities, hand launch: \$100,000
3	General Photography	All Zones	Opportunities are available around the Sea and in surrounding areas; unregulated activity.				Basic facilities: <\$100,000
19	Skydiving	Not included in discussion due to low support from survey respondents. May be re-evaluated at a later date provided user support enables the implementation of this activity.					
Not Ranked	Write- In: Cultural Tourism	All Zones; tied to specific physical or historic features, land uses, or habitats	No designated facilities	12-24 minor; 6-12 major facilities	N/A	50,000	Simple facilities: <\$100,000; museums and complex exhibits: \$100,000 to \$500,000